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AUTHOR Holahan, Carole K.; Gilbert, Lucia A.
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ABSTRACT

The newly-emerging phenomenon of dual-career marriages was investigated using four major life roles--Professional, Spouse, Parent, and Self as Self-Actualized Person. Six scales were constructed to measure potential conflict in areas represented by specific pairs of these roles (e.g., the area of Professional versus Parent). One major purpose of the study was to compare the degree of reported stress in these areas of potential interrole conflict. In addition to the prediction of gender differences, greater role conflict was anticipated for professional couples who are parents, in comparison to those who are not. Given the demanding nature of the Parent and Professional roles, higher stress was also expected in role-conflict areas involving these roles. Other purposes were to investigate the correlates of role conflict, particularly in women who are members of dual-career marriages, and to investigate the influence of parenthood. The prediction of gender differences in regard to areas and correlates of interrole conflict was not supported, except for level of career aspiration, where high aspirations were negatively related to role conflict for men but positively related to role conflict for women. Strikingly different patterns of conflict, however, were found as a function of the presence or absence of children. (Author)

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Interrole Conflict for Dual Career Couples

The Effects of Gender and Parenthood

Carole K. Holahan and Lucia A. Gilbert
The University of Texas at Austin

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Correspondence should be addressed to:

Carole K. Holahan
Department of Psychology
Mezes 330
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas 78712

Lucia A. Gilbert
Department of Educational Psychology
EDB 504
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas 78712

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Interrole Conflict for Dual Career Couples: The Effects of Gender and Parenthood

Carole K. Holahan and Lucia A. Gilbert CG013544

The University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

An investigation of the newly emerging phenomenon of dual career marriages was conducted within a framework of interrole conflict among major life roles and its correlates. The prediction of gender differences in regard to areas and correlates of interrole conflict was not supported. The one exception was level of career aspiration where high aspirations were negatively related to role conflict for men but positively related to role conflict for women. Strikingly different patterns of conflict, however, were found as a function of the presence or absence of children.

Interrole Conflict for Dual Career Couples: The Effects of Gender and Parenthood

Since the 1950's, there has been a steady increase in the participation of women in higher education and in the work force (Carnegie Commission of Higher Education, 1973). Concomitant with this trend in education and occupations has been the emergence of a new pattern of career aspiration in women in which both a demanding profession and marriage and family life are assumed. At the same time, however, the advent of the dual career marriage has been accompanied by a greater expansion of sanctioned roles for the female partner than for the male (Bernard, 1975; Rapoport and Rapoport, 1969). Thus, one would anticipate that the women in dual career marriages are experiencing higher role conflict than their spouses since they are now actively involved in adding a role (i.e., Professional) which may require attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with those of their more traditional roles (i.e., Parent and Spouse).

Previous studies (Berman, Sacks, & Lief, 1975; Bryson, Bryson, Licht, & Licht, 1976; Epstein, 1970; Hoffman & DeSole, 1976; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969) have identified some of the strains experienced by dual career couples. These investigations, however, have typically been conceptualized within a framework of time demands. Since according to role theory, interrole strain or conflict will occur when conflicting and competing expectancies are perceived from two or more roles enacted by an individual (Gross, Mason, & McEachern, 1958; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Secord & Backman, 1974), a conceptual framework which allowed for the direct focus on relevant life roles, rather than time

demands, seemed particularly appropriate to the study of dual career marriages.

Four major life roles were selected for the present investigation--Professional, Spouse, Parent, and Self as Self-Actualized Person. Six scales were then constructed to measure the potential conflict in those areas represented by specific pairs of these roles (e.g., the area of Professional versus Parent). One major purpose of the study was to compare the degree of reported stress in these areas of potential inter-role conflict. In addition to the prediction of gender differences, greater role conflict was anticipated for professional couples who are parents, in comparison to those who are not. Given the demanding nature of the Parent and Professional roles, higher stress was also expected in role-conflict areas involving these roles. A second purpose was to investigate the correlates of role conflict, particularly in women who are members of dual career marriages. The variables of interest were attitudes toward the roles of women, spouse support, and career commitment. Recent studies on women and careers suggest that profeminist attitudes toward the roles of women (Peplau, 1976), a high degree of career commitment (Hennig & Jardim, 1977), and a high level of spouse support (Bailyn, 1970; Gordon & Hall, 1974; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1969) are inextricably related to professional success. These correlates were also investigated for male members of dual career couples. In addition to the study of the correlates of role conflict with respect to gender, the influence of parenthood was also investigated.

Method

Subjects and Procedures

An anonymous questionnaire was mailed to a sample of dual profes-

sional couples at a large southwestern university. Of the 28 couples (42% response rate) who returned usable questionnaires, 10 couples had no children (non-parent group) and 18 couples did (parent group).

Measures

Role Conflict Scales. Six scales were developed to measure role conflict between pairs of the four major life roles of Professional, Spouse, Parent, and Self as Self-Actualized Person. Each scale measures a potential conflict between a pair of the four roles (e.g., Professional versus Parent). The scales are: Professional vs. Spouse (PR vs. SP), Professional vs. Parent (PR vs. PA), Professional vs. Self (PR vs. SF), Spouse vs. Self (SP vs. SF), Spouse vs. Parent (SP vs. PA), and Parent vs. Self (PA vs. SF).[1] (See Table 1)

Insert Table 1 here

Only the three nonparent scales were scored for the subjects with no children. Subjects were asked to respond to the items using a 5-point scale which ranged from 1 (causes no internal conflict) through 3 (causes some internal conflict) to 5 (causes high internal conflict). Thus high scores are associated with greater role conflict.

Attitudes Toward the Roles of Women (ARW). This measure consists of five items concerned with the career participation of women. Subjects responded on a 7-point scale with high scores being associated with more liberal attitudes.

Spouse's Support. Subjects indicated on a 7-point scale (a) how favorable their spouse's attitude is toward their being a professional, (b) the degree of emotional support provided by their spouse for their

professional work, and (c) how positive their spouse feels about their degree of commitment to their professional work. High scores on these items are associated with favorable spouse attitudes.

Self-esteem (SE). Self-esteem was measured by nine items drawn from a study by Bachman, Kahn, Davids n, and Johnston (1967). The Self-esteem scale measures satisfaction with life and self-esteem. Subjects responded on a 7-point scale with high scores being associated with high self-esteem.

Life Satisfaction from Each Major Role. Subjects were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale how much satisfaction they received from each of the four life roles included in the study. High scores on these items are associated with high life satisfaction.

Career Commitment. Subjects used a 7-point scale which ranged from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high) to indicate "how committed are you to your profession" and "how high are your aspirations in regard to professional recognition and achievement."

Demographic Variables. Information was also gathered in regard to number of hours per week devoted to profession and number of years in present profession.

Results

The findings for the major aspects of the study will be presented as follows: (a) comparisons of the degree of conflict experienced on each of the role conflict scales as a function of gender and parenthood; (b) comparisons of kinds of role conflict experienced by the parent and nonparent groups; and (c) correlations of the role conflict scores with the attitudinal and demographic variables.

Role Conflict and Its Relation to Gender and Parenthood

Two-way ANOVAs (gender x parenthood) were performed on the three role conflict scales not concerned with the parent role. No significant effects due to gender were found. In regard to parenthood, only one significant effect emerged, a parenthood main effect for Spouse vs. Self, $F(1,58) = 4.06$, $p < .05$ with the parent group (2.28) reporting greater conflict than the nonparent group (1.69). One-way ANOVAs (gender) performed on the three scale-scores concerned with the parent role resulted in no significant differences between the responses of male and female parents (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 here

Comparisons of Kinds of Role Conflict Experienced Within the Parent and Nonparent Couples

Repeated measures analyses of variance were performed on the three role conflict scores obtained from the nonparent couples and the six role conflict scores obtained from the parent couples. Both analyses afforded overall significant F values, $F(2,38) = 14.92$, $p < .001$, and $F(5,175) = 6.45$, $p < .001$, respectively, and specific pairs of means were compared by the method of Duncan. The results from these comparisons indicate that the area of Professional vs. Self caused significantly higher ($p < .01$) conflict than the other two areas for the nonparent group. For the parent couples, Professional vs. Self was again the area of most conflict. The areas of Professional vs. Parent and Self vs. Parent, however, were as conflictual for the parent couples as was Professional vs. Self, with these three areas being significantly ($p < .05$) higher in conflict than the remaining three (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 here

Correlates of Role Conflict for Women and Men

An overall picture of the relationship between role conflict and the various attitudinal and demographic variables for male and female subjects was obtained by intercorrelating subjects' responses separately for the male and female groups. Of interest were both the degree of correlation between the role conflict variables and the various other variables for the female and male groups separately and the difference in the set of correlations obtained from each group. Thus, the differences between appropriate pairs of r's were tested using Fischer's z transformation (McNemar, 1969) (see Table 4).

Insert Table 4 here

The correlational patterns for male and female subjects were highly similar, particularly in the four role-conflict areas of Professional vs. Spouse, Professional-vs. Self, Spouse vs. Parent, and Parent vs. Self (see Table 5). Lower conflict in both genders generally tended to be correlated with higher self-esteem, more profeminist attitudes, higher satisfaction from the major life roles, working fewer hours, higher spouse support, and higher career commitment.

An important exception to the similarity of male and female correlational patterns was the level of aspiration variable. The degree of relationship between career aspirations and role conflict differed consistently across areas of conflict with aspirations being negatively correlated with conflict for males and positively correlated with conflict for females.

Correlates of Role Conflict for Parents and Nonparents

The responses on the three nonparent scales were intercorrelated with the various other variables for the parent and nonparent groups separately. Fischer's z transformation was used to test the difference between the correlations for the two groups. In the absence of a total role conflict score, the parent and nonparent groups were compared on the nonparent scales only, since they were applicable to both groups (see Table 5).

Insert Table 5 here

The correlational patterns for the nonparent role conflict scales were extremely similar, with strikingly different patterns being obtained for the parent and nonparent couple groups on all three scales (see Table 5). Specifically, for the nonparent couples group, high role conflict was associated with working fewer hours, low career commitment and low aspiration level. For the parent couples, on the other hand, high role conflict was associated with traditional attitudes, working more hours, unfavorable attitudes of spouse, lack of spouse support, and negative feelings from spouse about one's degree of career commitment.

Discussion

The dual professional couples in the present sample are unique in their successful pursuit of a style of life which is still somewhat innovative for our society. These couples exhibit both high levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (see Table 2). In order to better understand how this group of couples is able to meet the challenges implicit in the dual career situation, the more compelling findings concerning the dynamics of role conflict in these marriages will be discussed.

Gender and Role Conflict

The fact that high career aspirations were negatively related to role conflict for men and positively related for women supports the basic role conflict model underlying the present study. That is, men with high aspirations are performing in a manner congruent with society's expectations, while women with high career aspirations are adding a nontraditional role.

The lack of gender differences in role conflict in the present study is then at first glance rather surprising. These findings appear to contradict those of Rapoport and Rapoport (1969), for example, where greater role overload for professional women due to the stronger cultural mandate for women to be involved in domestic life was reported.

Several factors may account for the present findings with respect to gender and role conflict. Both men and women reported high levels of career commitment and aspirations and were decidedly pro-feminist in their attitudes toward the roles of women. Moreover, the mean level of spouse's emotional support for career pursuit was quite high, with no differences occurring between the support experienced by men and women. Thus, it appears that these women place a high priority on their careers and are involved in egalitarian marriages in which their spouses are strongly supportive of their career goals and probably share in home management and child care as well.

Another possible explanation for the lack of gender differences is that although these women may, in fact, be faced with greater role demands than their spouses, they are extremely effective in dealing with them. There are indications, for example, that professional women in general may be highly agentic (Beane, Note 1; Burke and Weir, 1976).

Alternatively, it may be the case that the women in dual career couples are particularly able to cope with the stress which results from a life of many demands from several sources.

Areas of Greatest Conflict

The greatest role conflict for both the parent and nonparent groups appeared on the Professional vs. Self scale. Thus, contrary to the prevailing view, it appears that professionals may not obtain total life satisfaction from their professional role and may place high value on self-actualization and interpersonal relationships (Reich, 1970; Rogers, Note 2).

Correlates of Role Conflict

Strikingly different correlates of role conflict emerged for the nonparent and parent groups. The variables related to high role conflict for the former group reflect internal concerns related to career pursuit (i.e., low career commitment, working fewer hours) indicating that high role conflict is experienced when they are engaged in professional career pursuits but lack appropriate levels of career commitment. For the parent group, however, the variables related to high role conflict reflect the demands and complications accompanying the addition of the parent role. Higher role conflict, for example, is associated with greater number of hours worked and lower spouse support. It is also reasonable that traditional sex role attitudes are associated with higher role conflict, since they would be contrary to the flexibility demanded of both partners with respect to role enactment in the dual career situation.

Directions for Future Research

A more complete understanding of the dynamics of successful functioning in the dual career situation will, of course, require further study. Continuing work in this area should include both the investigation of personality characteristics of such couples, e.g., psychological masculinity and femininity, as well as the psychological strategies which they utilize in coping with stress associated with role conflict. The coping typology developed by Hall (1972) is relevant here as are other approaches which lead to a better understanding of role conflict management.

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Footnotes

[1]In general, the correlations between the role conflict scales were low to moderate with higher correlations occurring for pairs of scales having overlapping roles, e.g., Professional vs. Self and Professional vs. Parent.

Table 1

Representative Items from the Six Role-Conflict Scales

Scale	No. of Items	r	Representative Item
Professional vs. Spouse	3	.81	Wanting to be a "good" spouse vs. being unwilling to risk taking the time from your professional work.
Professional vs. Parent	4	.81	Spending most evenings on work-related activities vs. spending most evenings with your family.
Professional vs. Self	4	.86	Wanting to be recognized as a high level professional vs. wanting to maximize your personal development.
Spouse vs. Parent	3	.82	Spending prime time developing and maintaining the relationship with your spouse vs. spending prime time developing and maintaining the relationship with your child.
Spouse vs. Self	4	.75	The life style you prefer vs. the life style preferred by your spouse.
Parent vs. Self	3	.88	Giving priority to your family vs. giving priority to yourself.

Table 2

Summary of Gender and Parenthood Means

for Role Conflict, Self-Esteem, and Life Satisfaction

	Gender				Parenthood			
	Female		Male		Nonparent		Parent	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Professional vs. Spouse	2.02	1.17	2.07	.99	1.95	1.06	2.10	1.09
Professional vs. Self	2.68	1.38	2.83	1.27	2.74	1.23	2.77	1.38
Spouse vs. Self	2.12	1.01	2.01	.98	1.69	.75	2.28	1.05
Professional vs. Parent	2.73[a]	1.31	2.62	1.11	--	--	2.68	1.20
Spouse vs. Parent	1.99[a]	1.08	1.89	1.04	--	--	1.93	1.04
Parent vs. Self	2.98[a]	1.41	2.46	1.19	--	--	2.71	1.31
Self-esteem	5.75	.73	5.74	.63	5.68	.76	5.77	.63
Professional Life Satisfaction	5.43	1.35	5.43	1.40	4.75	1.74	5.81	.92
Spouse Life Satisfaction	5.86	1.46	5.71	1.49	5.50	1.96	5.94	1.09
Parent Life Satisfaction	4.96[a]	2.01	5.50[a]	1.64	--	--	5.67	1.37
Self Life Satisfaction	5.23	1.28	5.04	1.51	4.50	1.58	5.46	1.17
Attitudes Toward Roles of Women	6.07	.91	6.07	.71	6.37	.65	5.90	.85

Note. Higher scores are associated with greater conflict and and higher self-esteem and life satisfaction.

[a] For parent subjects.

Table 3

Summary for Kinds of Role Conflict Reported by Nonparent and Parent Couples

Kind of Role Conflict	Couples			
	Nonparent		Parent	
	M	SD	M	SD
Professional vs. Spouse	1.95	1.06	2.10	1.09
Professional vs. Self	2.74	1.23	2.77	1.38
Spouse vs. Self	1.69	.75	2.28	1.05
Professional vs. Parent	--	--	2.68	1.20
Spouse vs. Parent	--	--	1.93	1.04
Parent vs. Self	--	--	2.71	1.31

Note. For the nonparent couples, the method of Duncan indicated that Professional vs. Self was significantly higher ($p < .01$) than the other two areas. For the parent couples, Professional vs. Self, Professional vs. Parent, and Parent vs. Self all differed from the remaining three areas ($p < .05$) but did not differ from each other.

Table 4

Intercorrelations of Stress in Six Role-Conflict Areas with Relevant Demographic and Attitudinal Variables for Male and Female Subjects

	Areas of Role Conflict											
	Professional vs. Spouse (N = 28)		Professional vs. Self (N = 28)		Spouse vs. Self (N = 28)		Professional vs. Parent (N = 18)		Spouse vs. Parent (N = 18)		Parent vs. Self (N = 18)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Self Esteem	-.43[2]	-.43[2]	-.39[2]	-.39[2]	-.33[1]	-.65[3a]	-.43[1]	.11[b]	-.26	.08	-.29	-.37
Attitudes toward Women's Roles	-.12	.05	-.21	-.23	-.24	-.20	-.17	-.33	-.16	-.49[2]	.02	-.45[1a]
Professional Life Satisfaction	.07	-.03	.02	.00	.32[1]	-.15[b]	.26	.55[2]	.37	.41[1]	.34[1]	.15
Spouse Life Satisfaction	-.06	-.11	.03	-.10	-.08	-.32	.09	.30	.39	.06	.09	-.32
Parent Life Satisfaction	-.20	.06	-.18	-.20	.04	-.14	-.03	-.05	.15	-.10	-.09	-.24
Self Life Satisfaction	-.11	-.10	-.03	-.12	.03	-.35[1a]	.01	.09	.16	.12	-.04	-.43[1]
Number of Hours Worked	.45[2]	.30	.37[2]	.22	.29	.14	.08	.48[2]	-.15	.60[3c]	.02	.29

(Continued on next page)

(Table 4 continued)

	Professional vs. Spouse		Professional vs. Self		Spouse vs. Self		Professional vs. Parent		Spouse vs. Parent		Parent vs. Self	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Spouse Attitudes	-.47[2]	-.57[3]	-.21	-.35[1]	-.58[3]	-.64[3]	-.20	.03	.06	.01	-.42	-.44[1]
Spouse Emotional Support	-.55[3]	-.57[3]	-.32[1]	-.34[1]	-.55[3]	-.61[3]	-.22	-.17	.10	-.15	-.12	-.46[2]
Spouse Reaction	-.57[3]	-.53[3]	-.45[3]	-.40[3]	-.64[3]	-.52[3]	-.28	-.18	.08	.18	-.24	-.45[1]
Degree of Commitment	-.05	-.19	-.26	-.35[1]	-.09	-.36[1]	-.17	-.07	-.22	.01	.02	-.20
Aspiration Level	.15	-.35[1b]	.26	-.49[3c]	.14	-.47[2c]	.46[2]	-.07[b]	.34	.15	.37	-.17[a]

Significance level of correlations

1 < .10
2 < .05
3 < .01

Significance level of difference in correlations for males and females

a < .10
b < .05
c < .01

Table 5

Intercorrelations of Three Role-Conflict Areas with Relevant Demographic and Attitudinal Variables for Parent and Nonparent Groups Separately

	Areas of Role Conflict					
	Professional vs. Spouse		Professional vs. Self		Spouse vs. Self	
	Non-parent (N=20)	Parent (N=36)	Non-parent (N=20)	Parent (N=36)	Non-parent (N=36)	Parent (N=20)
Self Esteem	-.57[3]	-.35[2]	-.48[2]	-.34[2]	-.58[3]	-.51[3]
Professional Life Satisfaction	-.06	.06	-.09	.11	-.31	.17
Spouse Life Satisfaction	.16	-.34[2]	.16	-.23	-.16	-.37[2]
Parent Life Satisfaction	--	-.24	--	-.17	--	-.24
Self Life Satisfaction	-.05	-.17	.01	-.14	-.24	-.33[2]
Attitudes Toward Roles of Women	.33	-.19[b]	.00	-.32[2]	-.07	-.18
Number of Hours Worked	-.05	.53[3b]	-.09	.43[3b]	-.38	.29[c]
Spouse Attitudes	.15	-.66[3c]	.05	-.35[2a]	-.18	-.64[3b]
Spouse Emotional Support	-.08	-.71[3c]	-.10	-.41[2]	-.03	-.64[3c]
Spouse Reaction	.02	-.70[3c]	-.06	-.54[3b]	.04	-.63[3c]
Degree of Commitment	-.43[2]	.10	-.52[2a]	-.16[a]	-.73[3]	-.07[c]
Aspiration Level	-.29	-.01	-.54[2]	.08[c]	-.69[3]	-.01[c]

Significance level of correlations

1 <.10
2 <.05
3 <.01

Significance level of difference in correlations for parent and nonparent groups

a <.10
b <.05
c <.01